THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) No reliable information in regard to the operational airports in North-East region prior to independence of India is available.

(b) The airports at Agartala, Lenpui (Aizawl), Bagdogra, Dibrugarh, Dimapur, Guwahati, Imphal, Jorhat, Silchar, Tezpur, Lilabari (North Lakhimpur) and Shillong (Barapani) in the North-East are presently operational but no scheduled flights are operating at present from Lilabari and Shillong airprots.

(c) The airports at Passighat, Rupsi, Turial (Aizawl), Shella, Kamalpur, Kailashahar and Khowai in the North-East are presently non-operational. It is true that there has been decrease in the number of airport connected with air services over a period of time. This has been due to the shortage of smaller aircraft with domestic operators. The non-operational airports can be made operational once airlines indicate their plan for starting their operations through those non-operational airprots.

(d) Alliance Air, a wholly owned subsidiary of Indian Airlines, have issued a global tender in July, 2001 for dry lease-in of six ATR 42-500 aircraft to improve air connectivity in the country including the North-Eastern Region.

Expansion of new routes

1679. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal for the expansion of air services in the country;

(b) if so, the details of the programmes drawn up in this regard;

(c) whether new routes and additional flights are proposed to be introduced in the existing routes during the current financial year; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) to (d) Airlines operators are free to operate on any route/to connect any place based on their commercial judgement subject, of course, to compliance with the route dispersal guidelines which provide for certain minimum operations in specified category of routes.